

# Bristow residents hear next steps about Superfund site

By CASEY SMITH World Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, January 31, 2014 12:00 am

BRISTOW - Refineries that began operating a century ago did not have the ways of handling environmental concerns that businesses do today.

In fact, they didn't have environmental concerns, a representative from the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality told a crowd of around 75 Bristow-area residents at an open house Thursday night.

The Oklahoma DEQ hosted the meeting at the Bristow Public Library to inform residents about the next steps in the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund program process and the reasons an area just outside the city limits is now part of the government's cleanup program for hazardous sites.

In December, the EPA named the 125-acre site just northeast of Bristow to the list of land that is so contaminated the government needs to spearhead its cleanup.

The Superfund site is the former location of two oil refineries with overlapping boundaries that operated for decades on the street known as "Old Refinery Road."

The Wilcox Oil Co. operated as a crude oil refinery from the 1920s until 1963 and constructed a skimming and cracking plant during that time. Wilcox expanded by acquiring the adjacent Lorraine Refinery during the late 1930s.

The atmosphere became tense as attendees learned that state and federal agencies do not yet know all the answers about what health and environmental risks may be present at the Superfund site.

Monty Elder, a DEQ informational representative, estimates that it will take environmental agencies two years to conduct the upcoming remedial investigation and feasibility study.

Because these studies are yet to begin, the DEQ and EPA staff don't know the exact environmental risk and physical problems those hazards could cause.

"Is that risk an increase in health problems from some disease?" Elder asked. "We don't know because we don't have that information yet."

Environmental agency officials instructed residents to avoid contact with soil in the Superfund site and to avoid contact with visible signs of oil refinery waste.

It is important to take precautions such as washing hands and to avoid tracking soil into homes, they said.

Six homes and a church are located on the Superfund site. The First Assembly of God's congregation stopped holding services and meetings in its building in late August because of safety concerns.

Cleanup conducted through the Superfund program is paid for by the parties responsible for contamination, Elder said.

Because the Wilcox Oil Co. no longer exists, the EPA is searching for parties who acquired Wilcox and, by law, the oil refinery's liability.

If no responsible party is found, the federal government will pay for cleanup, Elder said.

If a responsible party is found but refuses to pay for cleanup, the federal government will handle the bill and then sue the company for three times the cost.

Cleanup, however, cannot begin until a two-part investigation is completed to fully understand the extent of site contamination and the best way to handle the problem.

"This is not quick. If this gets done in a year, that's the fastest I've ever seen it done," Elder said.

She said the community can be involved in the Superfund process in ways that include one-on-one interviews with environmental agency staff and input on the locations where samples will be taken to look for contamination.

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